

ROADSIDE SURVEYS AND INVESTIGATIONS
(Unit V. - Border Services and Control - 1952)

"HOW ROADSIDE CONDITIONS AFFECT HIGHWAY SAFETY AND DEVELOPMENT"

Panel discussions and informal talks instead of formal papers were presented at sessions of the Committee on Roadside Development, in accordance with revised procedure adopted for the 1949 annual meeting.

Three open meetings of the Committee were held, one of which was a joint evening meeting with the Committee on Land Acquisition and Control of Highway Access and Adjacent Areas, on the subject, "How Roadside Conditions Affect Highway Safety and Development".

Roadside surveys and investigations under way in a number of States were discussed as follows: (The complete discussions will be found in Bulletin No. 30, Highway Research Board (1950)).

Iowa State Survey, P. H. Elwood, Iowa State College

Highway Accident Rates as Related to Roadside Business and Advertising, Wilmer A. Rusch, Iowa State College

Accident Analysis - Telegraph Road, J. C. McMonagle, Michigan Highway Department

Progress Report on Accident, Access Point, and Advertising Sign Study in Minnesota, K. B. Rykken, Minnesota State Highway Department

Other State Surveys--Discussion

Professor P. H. Elwood, Head of the Department of Landscape Architecture at Iowa State College, discussed the study made in his State to ascertain facts about highway accidents and possible causes related to condition of the roadside. The study itself was made by Mr. Wilmer A. Rusch, under the guidance of Professor Elwood and with the cooperation of the Iowa State Highway Commission and the Iowa Safety Council.

HIGHWAY ACCIDENTS IN RELATION TO ROADSIDE BUSINESS AND ADVERTISING

Introduction

by Professor P. H. Elwood
Iowa State College

For many years an increasing number of sensitive and conscientious American Citizens have been deeply concerned, even shocked by the very rapidly increasing occupancy of our roadsides by outdoor advertising and business, often producing rural slums.

The rural slums adjacent to nearly every American City are fast becoming

a national disgrace. Until now, the situation is so appalling and universal that the American public is aroused as never before to the situation and is determined to check this menace to the otherwise good life in these United States. With this development or along with it, is the even greater increase in the sale and use of automobiles and automotive travel, until now more than 37 million Americans travel 300 billion miles over United States Highways each year.

This national disgrace was emphatically brought to our attention recently by the National Council of the Federated State Garden Clubs.

Highway Engineers rightfully claim we have in the United States, the finest highway system in the world, and we kill many times more people yearly than are killed normally in all of continental Europe. More than one-half of the world's automobiles are owned and operated in the United States.

Highway fatalities and accidents are rapidly increasing and will continue to mount unless something is done to improve driving conditions and lessen the hazards of driving in the United States.

Nearly 40,000 Americans will probably be killed on the highways of the United States during 1949 and nearly, if not more than, $1\frac{1}{2}$ million accidents leading to serious personal injury, not to mention the economic loss or cost of perhaps more than one billion dollars annually. The National Roadside Council is another National Organization vitally concerned with the disgraceful roadside conditions and is eager to further any move aimed to lessen or improve present conditions.

Last night I saw in this weeks "Life", the statement about New York's Thruway which when finished it said 'will be one of the longest, nearly 500 miles when finished, in the world, of 4 - 6 lane divided limited access highway from New York to Albany thence to Buffalo, and will have among other things, a minimum of 1000 feet of driving sight distance for motorists, not of advertising. But, no traffic lights, no billboards, roadside stands, or business, or grade crossing or intersections from end to end.' What a high standard for other states to shoot at.

It is all very well to cry "wolf, wolf" and to shudder as the devastation of our once fair scenery of our countryside, and to assail the presently legitimate roadside business. But to date we have not based our horror on anything but generalities and personal opinion. Even the great body of national organizations and millions of other incensed citizens are eagerly awaiting facts and figures. This is why we of the Roadside Committee welcomed the help and sponsorship of the Highway Research Board in promoting this work and these studies.

Therefore, last year with the help of the Iowa State Highway Commission and the Iowa Safety Council, a study was undertaken to ascertain some facts about highway accidents and some of the possible causes. Mr. Wm. A. Rusch was assigned the task to work not only with the Highway Commission and the Safety Council, but to make a sound, unbiased study and to follow the latest psychological and statistical procedures and methods in the study as well as to make a first hand reconnaissance in the field of the selected areas chosen for this study.

Mr. Rusch has from the start of the study, the experienced guidance and council of Dr. Lauer, Head of our Department of Psychology and of Dr. Jessen, Head of our Statistics Department at Iowa State College and Mr. Mark Morris of the Iowa State Highway Department.

No experienced or able research student starts out to prove foregone and other conclusions as personal opinions which he may wish to justify or verify. A good research man has simply an insatiable yearning for facts and the truth, so with the further help and encouragement of the head of our Departments of Civil Engineering and Economics, this study was begun to find out what, if any, evidence could be found for the rapid increase in highway accidents in Iowa.

Iowa has, as some of you know, one of the first completely concreted primary highway systems in the United States. Being one of the first states to completely pave its primary system it is now after 25 - 30 years use, needing rebuilding and replacement. We killed about 500 in Iowa in 1948, and probably more will be killed on our highways this year and in 1950.

Therefore, the Highway Commission is very anxious to know what changes in their plans and regulations should be proposed for the future expanded system in Iowa and perhaps elsewhere. The Commission's Director of Research, Mr. Mark Morris, therefore was most helpful in promoting this study and carrying on this study, otherwise it would not have been possible.

It should be noted that conditions in Iowa with its evenly distributed populations with no very large cities, the capitol, Des Moines, has less than 200,000. Also we must remember that to an Easterner, our countryside seems relatively undefiled by rural slums and billboards and advertising signs. But our cities, small as they are, will grow, and already are showing the awful effects of rural blight and slums.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that Iowa's greatest industry is Agriculture and its greatest resource is its black soil. Twenty-five percent of the nation's Class A land is in the State of Iowa. Anything that endangers the countryside of Iowa is harmful to all the people in the state. In other words, Iowans resent anything that injures the countryside or the interests of the farmer or agriculture.

In undertaking this study we had no great expectation that we would find any answers to this, the greatest nightmare of the planners. The two top planning problems facing modern planners throughout the world today are the decaying heart or core of our cities which are being studied and plans are being prepared on a nationwide basis for their redevelopment. The number two problem, no less important, though perhaps less spectacular is the development and gradual growth of rural slums on the areas adjoining our towns and cities. However, we just can't let things continue their present rate of growth and increase if we are to survive as a civilized people or if we are to preserve America the Beautiful. But, sentiment and opinions of idealists and wishful thinkers will never cure this evil and loathsome disease. We must have facts, we must analyze the facts before we can plan any course of action. The five essential steps in all planning are: (1) the survey and fact findings, (2) analysis of facts, (3) preparation of plan, (4) carrying out the plan, (5) operation and maintenance of the improved facility.

This study we present this evening is but a first step, feeble though it may be, but we hope you will pick it apart and help us make the next one better and more fruitful in future years, and we hope it will eventually mean safer, more economical and convenient and more beautiful highways in America. If we prove nothing more than the fact that more than one-half our accidents happen just outside our cities in these fringe areas infested with business and signs and billboards, it should have proven well worthwhile. Then what is the next step in our forward march toward preserving and cleaning up our roadsides?

Now, may I present Mr. Wilmer A. Rusch who made the study, and who will now explain how it was set up and how organized, the methods used, as well as explain some of the results.

Mr. Rusch then outlined the successive steps taken in carrying out the first study in Iowa which he described as an attempt to classify accidents by location and by cause in order to determine whether a relationship exists between the number, location, and character of accidents and the presence of roadside business and advertising.

Mr. K. B. Rykken, Manager of the State Highway Planning Survey of the Minnesota Department of Highways presented a report on the Minnesota roadside survey, including information with respect to techniques used and some "very preliminary results," as he described them. A report on a similar study by Mr. J. Carl McMonagle, Director of the Planning and Traffic Division of the Michigan State Highway Department was read to the group.

It is planned to have a more complete report of the above roadside surveys and investigations published by the Highway Research Board during 1950.^{1/}